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Level » Advanced

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China's 'violent philanthropist' gives away fresh air



Multimillionaire entrepreneur Chen Guangbiao raises awareness about pollution by giving away air-filled cans in Beijing AP

Before reading

1 Work in small groups and discuss the questions below.

a What is a philanthropist?

b Can you identify the philanthropists on the picture sheet (page 5)? Can you match the people to the descriptions?

c If you were very wealthy, would you become a philanthropist? Why/Why not? If yes, who or what would you give your money to?

2 Vocabulary from the article. Write the words next to the people described.
 descendant, donor, entrepreneur, environmentalist, passerby, sceptic, sibling

A person who ...

a makes money starting new businesses.

b doubts that something is true.

c gives money to charity.

d walks past something by chance.

e wants to protect the natural world.

f is the brother or sister of someone.

g is the grandchild, great-grandchild etc of someone. _____

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- 3 Look at the headline, photo and caption. Which words and phrases do you think could be applied to Chen Guangbiao? Check unknown words in a dictionary.**

☐ timid ☐ ebullient ☐ apathetic ☐ full of self-belief ☐ creative ☐ reticent ☐ a household name ☐ a high-profile person ☐ an unknown figure

Article

China's 'violent philanthropist' gives away fresh air

- 1 Even through the thick Beijing smog, it is impossible to mistake the ebullient figure shaking hands, signing autographs and barking at startled passersby: "Come on, two cans for each one - free fresh air. Open it and drink it and breathe it! It keeps you fresh the whole day!"
- 2 It is the kind of offer that has made Chen Guangbiao a household name in China: giving away thousands of tins of air to raise awareness of China's pollution. "If we don't act in the next 10 years, our descendants will have to carry oxygen tanks and wear masks all the time," he said at the publicity event in Beijing this month.
- 3 Chen, 44, is a multimillionaire entrepreneur who bills himself as the country's number one philanthropist and environmentalist.
- 4 In January, he lay under a sheet of wood and steel while two cars drove over him, to demonstrate that the world would be better without cars. In another comment on the drawbacks of motoring he smashed up a Mercedes Benz car.
- 6 Recently he put an advert in the New York Times proclaiming the disputed Diaoyu Islands - currently at the heart of the territorial row with Japan - to be Chinese, and announced he was giving new cars to drivers whose vehicles were destroyed in anti-Japanese protests - while simultaneously promoting a cycling initiative.
- 7 He also plans to give away \$240,000 to young entrepreneurs in the next weeks.
- 8 But he is best known for his personal deliveries to the victims of natural disasters. He arrived in Sichuan with a fleet of heavy machinery after the earthquake in 2008. When the tsunami struck Japan, he flew over with cash and goods.
- 9 He has apparently an unsinkable self-belief. "I want to record the name of Chen Guangbiao in Chinese history," he said.
- 10 His party trick is to lift a bike using his teeth and spin it around in the air. It is, says Chen, all down to kung fu training at the famous Shaolin temple.
- 11 Chen grew up in the countryside near Nanjing, in such poverty that two of his siblings starved to death. He earned his first cash - around 60 cents - carrying water from a well to villagers one summer, and used some of the money to help pay for a neighbour's schooling. In recognition of his good deed, a teacher pasted a red star on his face. "I ran around the classes ... Every student wanted to learn from me and do good things," he explained.
- 12 He made his fortune recycling materials from demolished buildings and has vowed to give it all away before his death. The Hurun rich list estimated his worth at \$740m last year. Already, he says, he has made donations worth \$278m. Others rank far ahead of him in independent lists of charitable donors and sceptics say it is hard to assess the real value of his gifts since they are often in kind. He counters that other philanthropists give to charities in the sectors they work in, with the hope of commercial returns.
- 13 Chen calls his high-profile tactics "violent philanthropy". He says: "My individual power is limited. I want to use my high-profile way to wake people up to take action together to do good things. I can only awake them with my performance art and creativity."
- 14 Admirers point out that most millionaires are doing little for their fellows. And Chen's stunts have, as he predicted, got people talking about philanthropy and the environment. "We need these kind of people to tell us that if you want to help people you need to take responsibility," says Wang Lanjun, pausing to have her photo taken with him.
- 15 "He's great!" enthused another passing pedestrian.
- 16 "He said I'm great," Chen points out. "You see? Ordinary people love me."

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Glossary

smog (noun) very dirty air that looks like a mixture of smoke and fog

startled (adjective) very surprised by something that has just happened

bill someone as something (verb) to describe or advertise someone in a particular way

vow (verb) to promise to do something (formal)

counter (verb) to reply to somebody by trying to prove that what they said is not true

While reading

- 1 Read the article. Which of these things has Chen Guangbiao done in his life? Write yes (Y) or no (N) next to the statements. Then change the “no” sentences to make them correct.

He has ...

a ☐ given out free oxygen masks to passersby in Beijing.

b ☐ lain under a wood and steel sheet while two vehicles went over him.

c ☐ destroyed a luxury car.

d ☐ bought new bicycles for people who lost theirs during a protest.

e ☐ taken heavy equipment to an area affected by an earthquake.

f ☐ flown to another country with goods and money after a disaster.

g ☐ helped pay for the education of some students at his village school.

h ☐ made a promise to give away all his money before he dies.

Which of the things above are environmental publicity stunts?

Which ones are acts of philanthropy?

- 2 Read the article again and answer the questions.

a What behaviour is mentioned in the article that shows Chen Guangbiao's ebullient personality?

b Which act of philanthropy seemed to contradict his anti-car campaign?

c What general reasons does he give for his philanthropic acts and environmental stunts?

d What sort of background does he come from and how did he make his fortune?

e How does he compare to other philanthropists?

f What do some sceptics say about him? What do admirers say?

Discussion

Watch the video of Chen Guangbiao at bit.ly/W5NdNE

Do you think you would be an admirer or a sceptic of him? Why?

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After reading

- 1 Nouns relating to publicity campaigns and philanthropy**
Complete the summary with the words below.
You may need to put them into the plural.

awareness, donation, drawback, fortune, initiative, poverty, responsibility, stunt

Chen Guangbiao is an extraordinary figure who started life in extreme

(a) _____ and then succeeded in making a huge (b) _____ through recycling building materials. He is famous in China for both his large (c) _____ to people in need and his spectacular publicity (d) _____ which aim to raise (e) _____ about key environmental issues. One of his latest (f) _____ has been to give away cans of fresh air to publicise the threat of air pollution. In addition, he has also organised events to show the significant (g) _____ of using motor vehicles. The hope is that his campaigns will encourage individuals and companies to take (h) _____ for their impact on the environment.

Look back through the summary. Make a note of any adjectives, verbs or prepositions that are used with the nouns, eg extreme poverty.

Activity - writing a profile

- Work as a class and brainstorm famous philanthropists/campaigners from your country and across the world.
- Work with a partner. Choose one of the people that interests you both.
- Write a short text about the person but leave out their name. Use some of the vocabulary from the After Reading section. Give information about the person's background, how they made their fortune, their philanthropic acts or awareness-raising stunts, the aims of their acts and their overall impact.
- Read the text to other pairs in the class. Can they identify who the person is? Do they know any more information about this person?

Answers

Before reading

- 1 a** A rich person who helps the poor and those in need.
b (picture sheet page 5) **Picture A:** Andrew Carnegie **B:** George Soros
C: Bill Gates
2 a entrepreneur **b** sceptic **c** donor **d** passerby **e** environmentalist **f** sibling
g descendant
3 ebullient, full of self-belief, creative, a household name, a high-profile person

While reading

- 1 a** N oxygen masks - cans of fresh air **b** Y **c** Y **d** N bicycles - cars **e** Y **f** Y **g** N some of the students at his village school - his neighbour **h** Y

Environmental publicity stunts: a, b, c.

Acts of philanthropy: d, e, f, g, h.

- 2 a** There are a number of indications of his ebullient personality: shaking hands, signing autographs, shouting out to passersby, having his photo taken with them. He also does the physical stunt of lifting a bike with his teeth.

b Buying cars for people whose vehicles were destroyed. This was done at the

same time as promoting a cycling initiative.

c He gives a number of reasons. He wants to record his name in history. He also wants to wake people up so that they take action together and do good things.

d He comes from a very poor background. He made his money recycling materials from demolished buildings.

e Other philanthropist are far ahead of him in lists of charitable donations.

f Sceptics say that it is impossible to identify how much he has given to charity because it is often in kind. Admirers say most millionaires do little for others.

They also say that Chen gets people talking about philanthropy and the environment.

After reading

- 1 a** poverty **b** fortune **c** donations **d** stunts **e** awareness **f** initiatives **g** drawbacks **h** responsibility

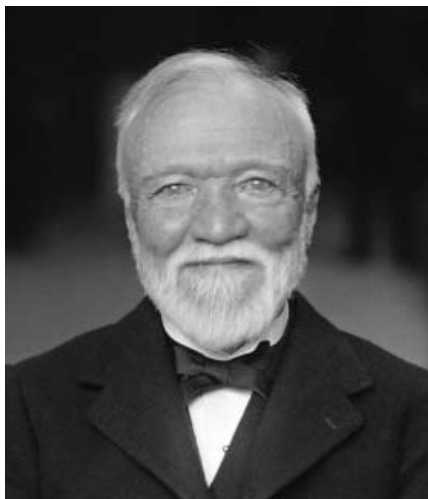
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Picture sheet

Philanthropists

Can you identify the philanthropists in these photographs?



A _____



B _____



C _____

Match the the photographs to the names and descriptions below

- ☐ Bill Gates (1955-) The co-founder of the software producer Microsoft. In 2012, he was estimated to be worth \$66bn. Gates set up the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000 and has donated billions of dollars to a range of initiatives including projects fighting Aids, tuberculosis and malaria, vaccination schemes aiming to eradicate polio and funding educational scholarships in the US.
- ☐ George Soros (1930-) Born in Hungary, George Soros is one of the most successful global financiers of his generation and is estimated to have a net worth of \$20bn. In 1984 he set up the Open Society Foundation, which has since given away over \$7bn to projects that support justice, education, public health, business development and an independent media.
- ☐ Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) Steel magnate and well-known philanthropist. He was born in Scotland but emigrated to the US in 1848. He made his fortune in the steel business and ran the corporation US Steel. On retirement he founded a number of charities through which he funded universities and public libraries in the US, UK and Canada, as well as many other projects.